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Elie Wiesel, crusader for justice, to speak at Wagner graduation



STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel will be the main speaker at Wagner College's 2012 commencement exercise on May 18.

"Elie Wiesel is one of this world's moral beacons," said President Richard Guarasci. "He has been a steadfast moral witness against genocide. I have been in his presence three times, and I can tell you that it is an experience I will never forget. We are highly honored to have him among us at this year's commencement."

Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, Transylvania, which is now part of Romania. He was 15 years old when he and his family were deported by the Nazis to Auschwitz. His mother and younger sister died, but his two older sisters survived.

Wiesel and his father were later transported to Buchenwald, where his father died shortly before the camp was liberated in April 1945.

After the war, Wiesel studied in Paris and later became a journalist. During an interview with the distinguished French writer Francois Mauriac, he was persuaded to write about his experiences in the death camps. The result was his internationally acclaimed memoir, "Night (La Nuit)," which has since been translated into more than 30 languages.

He is president of the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity, an organization he and his wife, Marion, created to fight indifference, intolerance and injustice.

A devoted supporter of Israel, Wiesel has also defended the cause of Soviet Jews, Nicaragua's Miskito Indians, Argentina's desaparecidos, Cambodian refugees, the Kurds, victims of famine and genocide in Africa and of apartheid in South Africa, and victims of war in the former Yugoslavia.

For more than 15 years, Wiesel and his wife have been especially devoted to the cause of Ethiopian-born Israeli youth through the Wiesel Foundation's Beit Tzipora Centers for Study and Enrichment.

Teaching has always been central to Wiesel's work. Since 1976, he has been the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University, where he also holds the title of university professor. He is a member of the faculty in the Department of Religion as well as the Department of Philosophy.

Wiesel is the author of more than 50 books of fiction and nonfiction. For his literary and human rights activities, he has received numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal, the National Humanities Medal, the Medal of Liberty and the rank of Grand-Croix in the French Legion of Honor.

In 1986, Wiesel won the Nobel Prize for Peace.